

Message Text

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13/46

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 OMB-01 DPW-01 DHA-02 TRSE-00 EB-07

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R 191223Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6289

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

USUN NEW YORK 1724

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY MANILA

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 31829

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING AMEMBASSY MANILA AS INFO ADDRESSEE)

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH

SUBJ: THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SINCE THE TAKEOVER

SUMMARY: THAI MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SINCE MILITARY TAKEOVER HAS BEEN DISORGANIZED, DEMORALIZED AND UNRESPONSIVE. IF OFFICIALS THERE KNOW WHERE THAI FOREIGN POLICY IS HEADED, THEY ARE NO LONGER SHARING THE INFORMATION. THERE IS A PERSONNEL REORGANIZATION GOING ON, AND MFA GENERALLY APPEARS TO LACK LEADERSHIP AT THIS POINT, ALTHOUGH WONG PHOLNIKON HAS NOW STARTED WORK AS THE UNDER SECRETARY, REPLACING ANAN PANYARACHUN. POOR MFA MORALE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO RETURN TO POWER OF THAI MILITARY WHO, MANY MFA OFFICIALS PRESUME, WILL AGAIN PLAY MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ROLE. MFA PERSONNEL ARE ALSO DISCOURAGED AT SUSPENSION FROM OFFICE AND INVESTIGATION OF FORMER UNDERSECRETARY ANAN, WHOSE INFLUENCE

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IN THE MINISTRY WAS EXTENSIVE. APPROVAL BY CABINET ON

NOV 16 OF AMBASSADOR WONG PHOLNIKON AS UNDERSECRETARY, REPLACING ANAN, MAY SIGNAL BEGINNING OF PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTION OF MFA. END SUMMARY.

1. SINCE THE OCT 6 MILITARY TAKEOVER, AND PARTICULARLY AFTER THE SUSPENSION AND INVESTIGATION OF FORMER UNDERSECRETARY ANAN PANYARACHUN WERE ORDERED ON OCT 22, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS BEEN DISORGANIZED AND DEMORALIZED. EMBASSY CONTACTS THERE HAVE REMAINED FRIENDLY, BUT THERE IS A NOTABLE CHANGE IN THE OPENNESS AND RESPONSIVENESS OF MFA PERSONNEL, A PHENOMENON WHICH OTHER DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL STATIONED IN BANGKOK HAVE ALSO FOUND FRUSTRATING. MINISTRY EFFICIENCY HAS NEVER BEEN PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY, BUT THERE DID EXIST A SMALL GROUP OF PROFESSIONALS AT THE MID-CAREER LEVEL (DIVISION CHIEFS, USUALLY IN THEIR 30'S) WHO HAD AN INPUT INTO AND WERE KEPT INFORMED OF DECISIONS. THEY NOW HAVE LITTLE TO OFFER AND ARE CAUTIOUS IF NOT TOTALLY SILENT ABOUT RTG ATTITUDES (TO WHICH THEY PROBABLY ARE NOT ALWAYS PRIVY).

2. SOME OF THE MINISTRY'S DIFFICULTIES DERIVE FROM A BROAD PERSONNEL REORGANIZATION EFFORT WHICH, ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, WILL EXTEND AS LOW AS THE DIVISION CHIEF LEVEL. REPLACING ANAN AS UNDER SECRETARY IS WONG PHOLNIKON, WHO WAS MOST RECENTLY AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA. BORN IN NONG KHAI ON MAY 1, 1919, WONG RECEIVED LAW AND ECONOMIC DEGREES FROM THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY IN 1940 AND 1941. DURING WW II, WONG WAS A 2ND LT. IN THE FREE THAI MOVEMENT WORKING WITH ALLIED FORCES IN CEYLON. HE JOINED THE FOREIGN SERVICE IN 1947, HAVING PREVIOUSLY WORKED FOR THE COMMERCE MINISTRY. HIS FIRST OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENT WAS WITH THAI MISSION TO UN FROM 1952-56. SUBSEQUENT SERVICE WAS IN MFA UN DIVISION (1957), EMBASSY IN RANGOON (1958-61), MFA INTERNAL SECURITY DIVISION (1962-65) AND OFFICE OF UNDERSECRETARY AS COUNSELOR (1966-67) AND DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY (1968-69), AMBASSADOR TO BURMA (1969-73) AND AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA (1973-76). WONG HAD BEEN DESIGNATED AMBASSADOR TO LAOS, BUT HAS INSTEAD ASSUMED DUTIES AS UNDER SECRETARY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THAILAND WILL LEAVE A CHARGE IN LAOS RATHER THAN ASSIGN AMBASSADOR AT THIS TIME.

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3. AT THE DIRECOTR GENERAL (DG) LEVEL, PIRAPONG KASEMSI HAS ASSUMED THE ACTING DIRECTORSHIP OF THE POLITICAL DEPARTMENT IN ADDITION TO HIS DUTIES AS DG OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DEPT. PIRA REPLACES HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, KOSON SINTHAWAN, WHO WAS SUSPENDED AT THE SAME TIME AS UNDER SECRETARY ANAN AND IS PRESENTLY "UNASSIGNED". BOTH KOSON AND CHAWAN CHAWANIT, WHO WAS ALSO RELIEVED

OF HIS DUTIES BY THE NARC, WILL PROBABLY EVENTUALLY BE ASSIGNED ABROAD IF THEY HAVE THE PATIENCE TO AWAIT MINISTRY ACTION. INFORMATION DEPT DG NISAI WECHACHAWA IS SLATED TO REPLACE CHAWAN AS DG OF THE ASEAN DEPT.

4. CHANGES AT LOWER LEVELS HAVE INCLUDED THE REPLACEMENT OF AMERICA DIVISION CHIEF WORAPHUT CHAINAM (WHO HAS FOR SOME MONTHS BEEN EXPECTING OVERSEAS POSTING AND IS BEING ASSIGNED TO GENEVAL, BY CHAWAT ARATHAYUK OF THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT, AND A MOVE FOR ANAT SUWANWIHOK FROM THE PROTOCOL DEPT TO ACT AS SECRETARY TO FOREIGN MINISTER UPADIT.

5. BEYOND THE PROBLEMS OCCASIONED BY THE PERSONNEL RESHUFFLE, THE MFA APPEARS TO BE SUFFERING FROM LETHARGY AND LACK OF DIRECTION WHICH POSSIBLY DERIVES FROM THE RETURN TO POWER OF THE THAI MILITARY WHO, MANY MFA OFFICIALS PRESUME, WILL AGAIN PLAY A MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ROLE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MFA. NEW FOREIGN MINISTER UPADIT, ALTHOUGH KNOWN AS A COMPETENT DIPLOMAT WELL-VERSED IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD, IS NOT CONSIDERED A VERY DYNAMIC LEADER. PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE MFA, SUCH AS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER THANAT KHOMAN AND GENERAL KRIANGSAK, HAVE BEEN DOING ALL THE RECENT TALKING IN PUBLIC ON FOREIGN POLICY.

6. THE MFA'S MALAISE ALSO REFLECTS THE EXTENT OF ANAN'S INFLUENCE OVER THE DIRECTION OF THAI FOREIGN POLICY AND THE OPERATION OF THE MINISTRY. THOSE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH ANAN OR THE FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES WITH WHICH HE IS CREDITED ARE UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT FUTURE REASSIGNMENT, AND MANY OF OUR CONTACTS TELL US FRANKLY THAT THEY NO LONGER KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON. THE SITUATION IS PROBABLY A PASSING ONE, BUT FOR HOWEVER LONG IT LASTS, LIFE
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AT THE MFA WILL NOT BE VERY HAPPY. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE EMBASSY'S ATTEMPTS TO ELICIT MFA VIEWS IN RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT ON A RANGE OF FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WILL DOUBTLESSLY BE HAMPERED.
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